

The Millennial Generation's Use of Social Media as a Complaint Method: An Application to Higher Education

Mary Beth Pinto
Penn State University – Erie

Phylis M. Mansfield
Penn State University – Erie

This article explores the Millennial generation's use of social media, specifically Facebook, and how it is used as a complaint method in a higher education context. A survey was conducted at a public university in the United States, with 413 respondents. Results indicate that 93% of the sample used Facebook, with women reporting greater usage. There were significant differences in complaining behavior between heavy and light users. Heavier users of Facebook were more likely to complain to other students face-to-face or to complain to the professor or other students via email, posting comments to an online chat room or on Facebook.

INTRODUCTION

Students from the millennial generation are filling the seats in college classrooms across the United States. With nearly 90 million born since 1980, this generational cohort is projected to make up a very large percentage of all co-eds in the future. From 2010 to 2019, National Center for Education Statistics projects a 9 percent rise in undergraduate enrollments of students under 25, and a 23 percent rise in enrollments of students 25 and over. In addition, Millennials are the largest and most racially and ethnically diverse generation ever to attend college (NCES, 2011). Among the characteristics used to describe are: pressured to perform, ambitious, tech savvy, team oriented, connected, demand instantaneous feedback, structured, respect authority, self-assured, and fast paced (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

Millennials were born and raised in a technologically advanced era, drastically different than those of previous generations. Technology has been part of their daily life from their reliance on Facebook, cell phones, and texting - to watching and/or creating their own YouTube videos, blogging on the Internet, or Skyping with others throughout the globe. Throughout middle school and high school their learning preferences and information usage behaviors have also gravitated toward technology-mediated learning (Gasson, Agosto, & Rozaklis, 2008) and Millennials have come to expect technology will be incorporated into their everyday life.

Though there are many good qualities about the Millennials, some of the characteristics of this generation create challenges for higher education. Millennials grew up being told by parents, relatives, coaches, etc. they were “special” and therefore, are highly expectant. “Millennials are arriving on campuses with higher expectations than any generation before them” (Slippery Rock University, 2010).

Many institutions are concerned that if the expectations of Millennials are not met, they will instantly tell hundreds of their friends via texting and/or Facebook. Being raised in a world dominated by technology, this generation tends to be impatient and desires immediate gratification. In addition, Millennials have been described as “blunt and expressive” favoring self-expression over self-control. Having their point “heard” is most important to them (NAS, 2006). Wanting immediate feedback, students from this generation consider themselves “customers” of higher education. They have assumed a consumer mentality, having been marketed to since birth (NAS, 2006).

Colleges and universities are shifting to a more “corporate marketing” model, putting greater emphasis on customer satisfaction models and customer-orientated programs to increase their enrollments and retain students (Alves & Raposo, 2010; Finney & Finney, 2011). In this framework, colleges or universities act as service providers in a customer relationship with students (Finney & Finney, 2010). As such, the student and the college or university are partners in a reciprocal relationship in which education (knowledge) is exchanged for money (tuition and fees). Both parties enter into the exchange with a set of expectations (Bagozzi, 1974). Failure to receive these expected outcomes may result in dissatisfaction. Garner (2009) contends that the number of student complaints on college campuses is rising. One potential reason for this rise is the “consumerist thinking” on campuses and students’ perceptions of themselves as customers (Finney & Finney, 2010). Therefore, higher education administrators are interested in the issues of student (customer) satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaining behavior.

BACKGROUND

Customer satisfaction and consumer complaining behavior have both been recognized in the academic and the practitioner world as important phenomena impacting an organization’s success. Several studies have supported this view, going as far as identifying successful complaint handling as a type of competitive advantage (Chahal, 2010; Fox, 2008; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998). A firm’s competitive advantage may actually be more impacted by customer retention than it is by other more commonly held factors such as market share and unit costs (Hansen, Samuelsen, & Andreassen, 2011). Customers who exit the firm cause reduced retention rates and reduced customer equity (Blodgett & Li, 2007; Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2000). Customer equity can be strengthened through the complaint process when consumer complaints are voiced and satisfactorily resolved. In fact, consumer loyalty will be greater as a result of this process, more than if no complaint had ever occurred (Stauss & Seidel, 2004). As such, marketers have embraced the fact that complaints are not nuisances, but opportunities to resolve problems, improve products and services, and develop value-added relationships by turning dissatisfied customers into satisfied, loyal ones (Bearden & Oliver, 1985; Chahal, 2010). It is also widely accepted that it is less costly for the firm to keep a current customer than it is to obtain a new one (Jaffee, 2010; Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990).

Models of Consumer Complaining Behavior

Despite the evidence that complaints are actually beneficial to an organization and the customer, many dissatisfied customers still do not complain directly to the marketer or organization. While the percentage differs by type of situation and type of industry, the majority of dissatisfied customers do not make a direct complaint (Andreasen, 1997; Best & Andreasen, 1977; Hansen, Samuelsen, & Andreassen, 2011). Studies in consumer complaint behavior have identified several ways that consumers manifest their dissatisfaction in addition to complaining directly to the marketer and have developed or extended models of such (Day & Landon, 1977; Hirschman, 1970; Singh, 1988; 1989; 1990).

While these models differ slightly, they have recurring themes that address the type of behavior, the entity to which the behavior is directed, and the method of expressing that behavior. It is commonly understood that dissatisfied consumers can either take action, or not take action. Dissatisfied consumers can either take action, or not take action. If they take action, consumer complaining behavior is typically expressed in these general categories: 1) Voice: complaining directly to the marketer or firm; 2) Third Party: complaints to consumer advocacy agencies such as the Better Business Bureau, contacting the

media, or taking legal action; 3) Negative Word-of-Mouth: telling others such as family or friends about their dissatisfaction, and 4) Exit: where no complaining is involved, but the customer defects by either shifting patronage or stop using the products or services from the dissatisfying firm. These response behaviors are not mutually exclusive, in that many complaining consumers engage in more than one type of behavior (Kurtulus and Nasir, 2008).

This study is particularly interested in the response behavior category of negative word-of-mouth and the means by which this behavior is communicated. When initially conceptualized as a behavior category, most negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) was communicated person-to-person. However, new technological advances have provided opportunities to communicate the NWOM via the Internet or via social networks. Complaints through electronic media such as the Internet have increased dramatically and will most likely continue to do so in the future (Tripp & Gregoire, 2011; Reisinger, 2009).

Use of Technology

The use of technological advances is particularly important to the millennial generation. Electronic media and social networks, instant messaging, twitter, and others have become a fact of life and are prevalent on college campuses today (Marketing Profs Research, 2010; Lenjart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). These types of communication allow college students to be connected 24/7 to friends, family, faculty, and business sites in ways which previous generations could not have imagined (Euro RSCG Worldwide Knowledge Exchange, 2010). Many campuses today are communicating almost exclusively through electronic media recognizing “an expanding reliance on electronic communication among students, faculty, staff and the administration due to the convenience, speed, cost effectiveness, and environmental advantages it provides” (University of Michigan – Dearborn, 2011).

According to Pinto and Mansfield (2006). “The proliferation of computer-mediated communication on college campuses suggests the need to reconsider complaining responses in the context of higher education” (p. 84). As such they expanded the complaining options for students to include an electronic complaint channel - i.e., email. Other researchers also document the use of web-based technology as channels for complaint behavior (Mukherjee, Pinto, & Malhotra, 2009; Lala & Priluck, 2011). Lala and Priluck (2011) included the use of social networking as a complaint channel.

Facebook

Facebook originated in 2004 as a college social networking site and since that time has attracted more than 800 million active users. Statistics from Facebook.com state that on any given day, more than 50% of their active users log on to the site (Facebook, 2011). Based on these statistics, it is not surprising that in 2011 Americans spend more time on Facebook than any other US website (Nielsen, 2011).

Facebook is ubiquitous on college campuses today. The Millennial generation, of which college students are members, have the highest concentration of social media usage (Marketing Profs Research, 2010). Numerous studies have documented over 85% of all college students have a Facebook account (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arsenseault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009; Sheldon, 2008a; 2008b). Millennials are more likely to feel that time spent on social networks such as Facebook is as valuable as time spent in person (Euro RSCG Worldwide, 2010). Facebook, as well as other social networking sites, are a perfect medium for self expression - something particularly attractive to Millennials or the “Look at Me” Generation (Sheldon, 2008a, p. 69). As a member-based Internet community, Facebook allows its users to post profile information, communicate with others by sending public or private online messages or wall posts, and to share photos online. Its features are constantly changing and being updated.

Millennials are drawn to Facebook to achieve some very fundamental human needs: “connection, conversation, and a sense of community” (Euro RSCG Worldwide Knowledge Exchange, 2010, p. 7). Sheldon (2008a; 2008b) studied the motives that bring college students to Facebook: 1) Relationship maintenance; 2) Passing time; 3) Wanting to be in virtual community; 4) Entertainment; 5) Coolness/fun; and 6) Companionship. She found that students go on Facebook to fulfill interpersonal needs first (relationship maintenance). For example, the need to communicate with others influences the use of

Facebook (Euro RSCG Worldwide, 2010; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009). Sheldon (2008a; 2008b) also found that gender was a significant predictor of students' motivation to go on Facebook and maintain their existing relationships. Women are more likely to use Facebook to stay connected, pass time and be entertained (2008b, p. 48).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Mangold and Smith (2012) found that Facebook and company websites are preferred by Millennials for voicing opinions about products or companies. Specifically in higher education, only one research study to our knowledge has looked at the use of Facebook as a complaint method (LaLa & Priluck, 2011). Their study identified the predictors of "students' intention to complain to school, friends, and others, both in person and using the web" (p.2). For data collection, the researchers used a critical incident approach, which allowed the students to recall a "really bad experience" they had with a professor. One drawback to this approach is that there are varying types of situations causing the dissatisfaction, and they had no way to control for differences that might occur between them. Additionally, in their response categories, the authors combined complaining to the professor (via email), dean, and academic advisor into one measure - entitled, "Intention to complain to school using web." This combination did not allow for "direct" voice to the professor either in the classroom or in his/her office, which would more closely represent the categories suggested in the literature by Singh (1988). Additionally, when measuring use of social networking, Lala and Priluck (2011) relied on response categories ranging from zero to "only" greater than three hours. Utilizing this type of categorical data did not allow for any grouping and comparison of respondents by usage categories (i.e., heavy versus light users).

This study will address the following research questions: 1) What are Facebook usage patterns among Millennials?, 2) What are the complaint behaviors of Millennials in higher education situations?, 3) Does the degree of Facebook usage impact the various complaint response methods (Facebook, email, face-to-face, etc.) in a university setting?, and 4) Does the dissatisfying experience situation impact the method of complaint?

METHODOLOGY

Phase I: Complaint Scenario Development

Complaint scenarios were used to gather data on student complaining behavior. To develop the scenarios, two focus groups were conducted with students from a large state university in the northeast region of the United States. Using the critical incident approach, students were asked to recall "a really frustrating experience with a professor." Four scenarios were developed from the information uncovered in the focus groups. Utilizing a modified version of the scale developed by McColl and Anderson (2002), the four scenarios were pretested with 78 undergraduate students to assess their level of frustration, stress, and irritation. Consistent with the threshold levels discussed by Singh and Pandya (1991), the two scenarios that generated the most negative reactions were chosen for the final data collection (See Appendix).

Phase II: Survey Data Collection

The sample for the data collection included a total of 441 undergraduates from a public university in the eastern half of the United States during the 2010-2011 academic year. Data was collected using a paper and pencil survey. Of the sample surveyed, 93.7% (N=413) of students had a Facebook account. Of those that had an account, 60% (n=247) were men and 40% (n=163) were women. The average age of respondents was 21 (M=21.32, SD = 3.301).

Measures

Complaint Intentions

Following a modification of the methodology used by Pinto and Mansfield (2006) respondents were presented with two case scenarios for collecting data on student complaining behavior. Respondents were asked to indicate how likely they would carry out specific complaint responses. Items were coded on a 5 point Likert scale (1= *Very Unlikely*; 5=*Very Likely*). The scale included items for each of the four complaining dimensions: Voice, Negative Word of Mouth, Third Party, and Exit. Use of social media was included with the item: "Go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note." The psychometric properties of the complaint intention scale were consistent with those reported by Pinto and Mansfield (2006).

Facebook Usage

To measure the frequency of Facebook use and duration of use, we relied on the measures by Sheldon (2008a). Respondents were asked how many minutes/hours they spend on Facebook in an average day and at what age they first joined Facebook. To break the sample into Facebook usage groups based on intensity of usage, we followed the Richins and Dawson methodology (1992) and created tercile ranks for *High, Medium, and Low Facebook Usage*, based on the number of minutes reported by the respondents (range from 2 to 490). The Medium group (usage minutes 35 to 60; $n = 118$) was eliminated to create a clear separation between respondents reporting low and high Facebook usage. Groups of students with High usage (usage minutes 80 to 490; $n = 136$) and Low usage (usage minutes 2 to 30; $n = 158$) were compared to assess significance on complaining behavior and demographic characteristics. The research questions that refer to comparisons by High and Low usage categories use a final sample of 294 respondents. This number was calculated by taking the total number of respondents answering the survey (413) minus the Medium usage group (118 respondents).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Facebook Usage Patterns

In answering the first research question, Facebook usage was analyzed in terms of whether or not the respondent actually used Facebook, the number of minutes users spent on Facebook in a typical day, and the age at which they first began using Facebook. As indicated in Table 1, in our sample ($n = 441$) 93% of the respondents had a Facebook account and used Facebook. Of those who used Facebook ($n = 413$), the average time they spent each day was approximately 75 minutes ($SD = 68.81$), with a range from 2 minutes to 490 minutes or approximately 8 hours. This wide range in reported activity could be suspect, however, in a previous study by Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009), the amount of time respondents reported spending on Facebook varied greatly from 2 minutes to 165 minutes. In the Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) study, undergraduate students were asked to keep a diary of Facebook usage. Their diary measure is likely to be closer to the actual time spent on Facebook than was the self-reported measure used in the current study, however, both reported the wide range in minutes spent by respondents. In the current study, the students also reported spending 52.9 minutes on email ($SD = 89.8$) in addition to the time spent specifically on Facebook.

The mean age at which respondents began using Facebook was 17.7 ($SD = 3.49$) with a range from 6 years to 21 years. An interesting finding in this study was that while the age at which respondents first began using Facebook was not significantly different between males and females, there was a significant difference regarding Facebook usage. Males reported a mean of 64.2 minutes per day while females reported a mean of 90.7 minutes per day, $p = .000$. This finding is consistent with other literature showing a significant difference in Facebook membership between males and females (Valensuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), with women showing heavier usage on the social networking site (Nielsen, 2010). While not a part of our original research questions, given the findings in Facebook usage between males and females, gender was used as a comparison variable in other areas of this study, to be discussed later.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

	All Students N=413		High Users N=136		Low Users N=158	
Gender	Males=60%; Females=40%		Males=46% Females=53%		Males=72.6% Females=26.6%	
Age at which began using Facebook	M=17.7	SD=3.49	M=17.03	SD=1.46	M=18.5	SD=4.61
Number of minutes on Facebook	M=74.7	SD=68.8	M=153.9	SD=4191.4	M=20.4	SD=86.9

In addition to these statistics, a comparison of High Users and Low Users as described above, was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in usage behavior. The High User group reported spending an average of 153.9 minutes ($SD = 4191.4$) or two and one half hours daily on Facebook and the Low User group reported spending an average of 20.4 minutes daily ($SD = 86.9$); results were significant with a value of $p = .000$. There was also a significant difference between the High User and Low User groups regarding the age at which the student began using Facebook. The average age was 17.03 for the High User group ($SD = 1.46$) and 18.5 for the Low User group ($SD = 4.61$), with a value of $p = .001$. Table 1 also contains these results.

Additionally, a Chi-Square analysis was conducted between gender and user group. Significant differences were found between the High User group where males comprised 46% of the sample ($n = 136$) and the Low User group where males were 72.6% ($n = 158$). The Pearson Chi-Square statistic was 22.850, with a value of $p = .000$. This finding supports previous research that females tend to be more intensive users of Facebook than males, and also supports our findings of the number of minutes both males and females spend on Facebook per day (Nielsen, 2010).

Consumer Complaint Behavior in a Higher Education Context

In terms of the complaint behavior of students in a higher education context, two scenarios were used in this study. Table 2 provides the mean, frequency, and percent of students' likelihood of engaging in several complaint response methods for Scenario 1. The frequency was calculated by adding together the number of responses of 6 or 7 on the 7-point Likert scale. In Table 2, the most likely methods for complaining included "complaining to other students face-to-face" ($M = 4.64$; frequency 169), "complaining to the professor via email" ($M = 3.85$; frequency 101), "complain to the professor in his/her office" ($M = 3.73$; frequency 93), and "never take another course from that professor again" ($M = 3.67$; frequency 96).

TABLE 2
COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR OF DISSATISFIED STUDENTS: CASE SCENARIO ONE

N=413				
Complaining Behavior	Mean	Frequency**	Percent	Std. Deviation
Complain to the professor in class.	2.71	40	9.0	1.81
Complain to the professor in his/her office.	3.73	93	21.1	1.95
Complain to the professor via email.	3.85	101	22.9	1.98
Complain to other students via email.	1.83	17	3.9	1.42
Complain to other students face-to-face.	4.64	169	38.3	1.97
Talk to an administrator.	2.25	22	5.0	1.57
Talk to a student governance representative.	1.57	8	1.9	1.12
Never take another course from that professor.	3.67	96	21.7	2.0
Post a negative comment to an online chat room	1.75	15	3.4	1.41
Go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note.	2.34	36	8.1	1.78

*Scale: 7 point Likert scale, anchored by 1= Not at all likely and 7=Very likely

**Frequency: # of responses of 6 or 7 on the 7-point Likert scale

Table 3 provides the data for the second scenario, where the most likely complaint responses were “complain to other students face-to-face” ($M = 4.41$; frequency 147), “complain to the professor in his/her office” ($M = 3.73$; frequency 96, and “never take another course from that professor again” ($M = 3.57$; frequency 96). Given that complaining to students face-to-face has the highest mean for both scenarios, it suggests that when students exit a classroom after a dissatisfying experience, they are directly face-to-face

TABLE 3
COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR OF DISSATISFIED STUDENTS: CASE SCENARIO TWO

N=413				
Complaining Behavior	Mean	Frequency**	Percent	Std. Deviation
Complain to the professor in class.	2.44	32	7.3	1.72
Complain to the professor in his/her office.	3.73	96	21.8	1.98
Complain to the professor via email.	3.48	77	17.5	2.02
Complain to other students via email.	1.83	14	3.2	1.40
Complain to other students face-to-face.	4.41	147	33.4	2.05
Talk to an administrator.	2.16	27	6.1	1.60
Talk to a student governance representative.	1.51	3	.7	1.00
Never take another course from that professor.	3.57	96	21.7	2.04
Post a negative comment to an online chat room	1.74	15	3.4	1.39
Go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note.	2.37	43	9.8	1.86

*Scale: 7 point Likert scale, anchored by 1= Not at all likely and 7=Very likely

**Frequency: # of responses of 6 or 7 on the 7-point Likert scale

with fellow class members and have an immediate opportunity to voice their complaint to others. It is interesting to note that when complaining directly to the professor students chose the least confrontational approach - i.e., choosing email over a visit to his/her office or a response in the classroom. There are several potential reasons for their reluctance including: attitude toward complaining (Blodgett & Granbois, 1992; de Matos, Rossi, Veiga, & Vieira, 2009; Singh, 1989), student personality issues (Bodey & Grace, 2007; Huang & Chang, 2008), classroom climate (Goodboy, 2011) and concern over grade in the class (Lala & Priluck, 2011).

An interesting finding is that complaining via Facebook was one of the lowest intended responses. It appears that students are not using Facebook as a complaint mechanism. Perhaps the reason for this result is that students are primarily drawn to Facebook for connection, community, and conversation (Euro RSCG Worldwide Knowledge Exchange, 2010). In the current study, students indicated they used social networks such as Facebook to communicate and stay in touch rather than to complain about unsatisfactory product/service encounters. In support of our finding, Mangold and Smith (2012) report that both male and female Millennials post positive comments more frequently than negative comments. However, their study found a significant gender difference in the number of negative comments posted. Males were more vocal and had a higher tendency to post negative comments.

Complaint Methods in Higher Education Context by Facebook Usage

The third research question addressed the relationship between the degree of Facebook usage and the likelihood to complain through various response methods. Table 4 provides the means and standard deviations for each complaint method across the two scenarios. An additional variable was computed, averaging the responses for the two scenarios on each complaint method. Independent t-tests were then used to compare the High User group and the Low User group on each of the complaint response methods. Significant differences were found between the two groups for six response types. For the response “complaining to the professor via email,” High Users of Facebook reported a mean of 3.50 ($SD = 1.75$) while Low Users reported a mean of 3.50 ($SD = 1.84$). For the response “complain to other students via email” High Users reported a mean of 2.11 ($SD = 1.65$) and Low Users reported a mean of 1.69 ($SD = 1.16$). The response of “complaining to other students face-to-face” reported the highest means for both groups, however, there was still a significant difference between the two. High Users of Facebook reported a mean of 5.04 ($SD = 1.72$) and Low Users reported a mean of 4.20 ($SD = 1.97$). There were also significant differences between High and Low users of Facebook for exit behavior; for the response “never take another course from that professor again” High Users reported a mean of 3.87 ($SD = 1.66$) and Low Users reported a mean of 3.38 ($SD = 1.88$). There was also a significant difference for the response “post a negative comment to an online chat room” where High Users reported a mean of 1.97 ($SD = 1.51$) while Low Users reported a mean of 1.64 ($SD = 1.21$). Finally, there was a significant difference between the two groups for the response “go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note,” with the High Users reporting a mean of 3.02 ($SD = 1.91$) and the Low Users reporting a mean of 1.91 ($SD = 1.49$).

TABLE 4
COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR OF DISSATISFIED STUDENTS: METHODS
COMPARISON BY USER GROUP

N=293	High Users=135		Low Users=158		P=
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Complaining Behavior					
Complain to the professor in class.	2.54	1.60	2.53	1.62	.950
Complain to the professor in his/her office.	3.79	1.64	3.73	2.03	.782
Complain to the professor via email.	3.98	1.75	3.50	1.84	.024**
Complain to other students via email.	2.11	1.65	1.69	1.16	.014**
Complain to other students face-to-face.	5.04	1.72	4.20	1.97	.000**
Talk to an administrator.	2.40	1.43	2.08	1.42	.056
Talk to a student governance representative.	1.70	1.10	1.48	.95	.065
Never take another course from that professor.	3.87	1.66	3.38	1.88	.021**
Post a negative comment to an online chat room	1.97	1.51	1.64	1.21	.042**
Go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note.	3.02	1.91	1.91	1.49	.000**

*Scale: 7 point Likert scale, anchored by 1= Not at all likely and 7=Very likely

**Significant at $p < .05$

Impact of Dissatisfying Experience

The fourth research question in this study asks if the dissatisfying experience itself has an impact on the complaint response method. To address this question, paired sample t-tests were used comparing the responses for the two scenarios. Table 5 provides the means, standard deviations, and p values for each comparison. Significant differences between Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 were found for three complain response methods. For each of the significant differences, Scenario 1 elicited the strongest complaint response. The first item is “complain to other students face-to-face” where the mean for Scenario 1 was 4.64, and the mean for Scenario 2 was 4.41. These means were the highest reported for both scenarios. While the reason for this reported intention is not known, one explanation is that since the students will be face-to-face while leaving the classroom where the dissatisfying situation has just taken place, they are already in a prime position for communicating their complaints to each other. For the results reported for the method “complain to the professor via email,” the mean for Scenario 1 was 3.86 and the mean for Scenario 2 was 3.48. The last significant difference was for the method “complain to the professor in class” where the mean was reported at 2.71 in Scenario 1, and 2.44 in Scenario 2. The findings for “complain to the professor in class,” which is a direct form of voice, are supportive of those by Singh and Pandya (1991), where voice behaviors were more likely to occur as the intensity of the dissatisfaction increased.

TABLE 5
COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR OF DISSATISFIED STUDENTS:
IMPACT OF DISSATISFYING EXPERIENCE

N=413 Complaining Behavior	Scenario 1		Scenario 2		P=
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Complain to the professor in class.	2.71	1.81	2.44	1.72	.000*
Complain to the professor in his/her office.	3.73	1.95	3.73	1.98	.977
Complain to the professor via email.	3.86	1.98	3.48	2.03	.000**
Complain to other students via email.	1.83	1.42	1.83	1.40	1.00
Complain to other students face-to-face.	4.64	1.98	4.41	2.05	.001**
Talk to an administrator.	2.25	1.57	2.16	1.60	.160
Talk to a student governance representative.	1.57	1.18	1.51	1.00	.234
Never take another course from that professor.	3.67	2.01	3.56	1.04	.175
Post a negative comment to an online chat room	1.75	1.41	1.74	1.39	.727
Go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note.	2.34	1.78	2.37	1.86	.613

*Scale: 7 point Likert scale, anchored by 1= Not at all likely and 7=Very likely

**Significant at $p < .05$

Gender Differences in Complaint Behavior

While not an original research question, findings began to emerge related to differences in complaining behavior between the genders. Tables 6 and 7 refer to the results from independent samples t-tests for Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 respectively. With regard to Scenario 1, there was a significant difference between males and females in their likelihood to “complain to the professor in class.” Males were more likely to complain than were females; males reported a mean of 2.92 ($SD = 1.87$) and females reported a mean of 2.41 ($SD = 1.68$), $p = .004$. In Scenario 1, this was the only complaint response category reporting significant differences between the males and females.

However, for Scenario 2 there were three response types with significant differences. Once again, the response behavior “complain to the professor in class” produced a significant difference between males and females, with males more likely to complain. Males reported a mean of 2.74 ($SD = 1.81$) and females reported a mean of 1.99 ($SD = 1.47$), $p = .000$. Additionally, for the response category, “complain to the professor in his/her office,” there was a significant difference between males and females, with males reporting a higher mean (3.94) and thus more likely to act through that response than did females ($M = 3.42$), $p = .009$. The third significant difference dealt with the likelihood of a student “talking to a student governance representative.” Once again, males were more likely to act in that manner than were females. Males reported a mean of 1.59 ($SD = 1.08$) while the mean for females was 1.39 ($SD = .87$). $p = .038$. Previous studies have provided mixed results with regard to gender, aggressiveness, and complaining behavior (Richins, 1983; Singh, 1988; Swanson, 2011). The findings in this study support previous research that males are more likely to complain in general, and that gender impacts the type of complaint response, with males more likely to act through more direct, confrontational methods than are females (Swanson, 2011).

TABLE 6
COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR OF DISSATISFIED STUDENTS: CASE SCENARIO ONE,
METHODS COMPARISON BY GENDER

N=410	Males=247		Females=163		
Complaining Behavior	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	P=
Complain to the professor in class.	2.92	1.87	2.41	1.68	.004**
Complain to the professor in his/her office.	3.80	1.64	3.73	2.03	.389
Complain to the professor via email.	3.91	1.99	3.78	1.99	.504
Complain to other students via email.	1.80	1.37	1.88	1.51	.569
Complain to other students face-to-face.	4.54	1.97	4.77	1.98	.248
Talk to an administrator.	2.32	1.62	2.15	1.50	.271
Talk to a student governance representative.	1.65	1.30	1.44	.95	.082
Never take another course from that professor.	3.63	2.05	3.73	1.93	.636
Post a negative comment to an online chat room	1.83	1.49	1.64	1.28	.171
Go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note.	2.26	1.79	2.48	1.77	.217

*Scale: 7 point Likert scale, anchored by 1= Not at all likely and 7=Very likely

**Significant at $p < .05$

TABLE 7
COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR OF DISSATISFIED STUDENTS: CASE SCENARIO TWO,
METHODS COMPARISON BY GENDER

N=410	Males=247		Females=163		
Complaining Behavior	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	P=
Complain to the professor in class.	2.74	1.81	1.99	1.47	.000**
Complain to the professor in his/her office.	3.94	1.99	3.42	1.92	.009**
Complain to the professor via email.	3.63	2.00	3.27	2.05	.081
Complain to other students via email.	1.89	1.44	1.72	1.31	.208
Complain to other students face-to-face.	4.35	2.02	4.50	2.10	.470
Talk to an administrator.	2.21	1.60	2.07	1.61	.383
Talk to a student governance representative.	1.59	1.08	1.39	.87	.038**
Never take another course from that professor.	3.58	2.06	3.55	2.02	.910
Post a negative comment to an online chat room	1.81	1.46	1.64	1.30	.213
Go to Facebook and post a negative comment about the professor and this circumstance as a status and/or note.	2.34	1.88	2.40	1.83	.759

*Scale: 7 point Likert scale, anchored by 1= Not at all likely and 7=Very likely

**Significant at $p < .05$

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The results from this study indicate that various factors affect students' methods of complaint behavior. A student's degree of Facebook usage (high versus low) has an impact on the type of complaint manifestation, as heavy users are more likely to complain to the professor (via email) and are more likely to complain through electronic media. Additionally, the findings indicate that complaint response methods are impacted by differences in the dissatisfying experience. Faculty and school administrators can manage their "customer" relationships by identifying the elements of students' academic programs that cause dissatisfaction and by managing complaints. As in the service industry, complaints in higher education are most helpful if made directly to the marketer, i.e. faculty or administration. Therefore, these should be encouraged while those made to friends and others should be minimized. As colleges and universities continue to see themselves as service industry providers, the shift toward customer-oriented satisfaction programs is necessary in recruiting and retaining students.

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APPENDIX

Scenario 1

In one of your classes, your professor collected an assignment that was due today. Unfortunately, you did not have the assignment ready to turn in because your computer malfunctioned last night and you could not print the assignment. Even though the course syllabus clearly states, "Late assignments will not be accepted," you decided to request an extension on the assignment until the next day. When you told your professor about the malfunction, he/she said, "This is unfortunate for you" and would not honor your request.

Scenario 2

Last week, you completed a case analysis that was 10 percent of your overall course grade. Today, you received your case analysis grade, which was lower than you were expected. You made an appointment with your professor to talk about your concern. He/she explained how the case analysis was graded using the rubric that was posted on Angel before the case study was given. You told him/her that the grading criteria on the rubric were unclear and did not provide you with enough information about how to properly complete the case analysis. The professor disagreed with you and said that if you had questions regarding the rubric, you should have come to him/her prior to submitting the assignment. The professor was not willing to reconsider your grade. Then, he/she advised you to follow the rubric thoroughly on the next case analysis.